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# Child Life in Liberia

By

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ONE thing which greatly impressed me in Africa was the love of parents for their children. Every man hopes to be called father, and every woman mother. I have never seen a man too great or in too much of a hurry to stop and lift up a little child who had fallen, and say, "Po quay" (Don't cry). Children are welcomed in every home, and the girls are treated as well as the boys, which is unusual in heathen countries. For a boy they must buy a wife, which is an expense; but, then, he will be a soldier and help to fight the wars of the country, and he will be a man to swell the number of the family. For a girl they will receive a dowry of sixty dollars or more—a large sum in Africa—and this helps to keep the family treasury full; but when a girl marries she becomes a member of her husband's family, and her own family is made smaller.

In West Africa the first child in a family or household to die does not receive a decent burial. It is not even washed or dressed, but is immediately carried out and buried in a hole; no one mourns for it, and no sacrifice is offered, as is

their custom. This is done to disgust the other members of the family, for they have an idea that if the first one to die is well treated the rest will say, "It is not such a bad thing to die and be buried like that; I will die too and let them make a feast for me." And so, one by one, the children will all die.

To make it seem more hideous to the children, if a small child dies first the mother carries it in her arms and puts it in the grave herself. I have seen a mother take her dead baby and go wailing all the way to the burial place.

After the death of two or three little children in a family they think it is the same child coming and going back again to the spirit world, for they believe that every child is the spirit of some one who has died coming back to this world. So when the child is put in the grave stones are thrown in on the little body. This is done in the hope that its spirit will be insulted so that it will not come back again, and when another child comes into the family it will be a new child and will stay.

One of the first things they do for a little child is to ask the "devil doctor" who the child is. Sometimes he will say, "This is the spirit of a great warrior who has lately died, and you must give him a warrior's outfit." In that case a gun, sword, spear, daggers, powder case, shot bag, war cap, war bell, and all the poison and charms used in their wars are given him. Again, the "devil doctor" may say, "This child has come to find something to take to the spirit world, and if

it is given anything it will be gone." In that case they do not even dress the child with the usual beads made from the seeds of trees, seashells, or little pieces of carved wood, nor put on perfume after its many baths every day; so that, as the spirit has not gotten what it came for, it will be induced to stay until old age.

Then, again, the "devil doctor" may say, "This child is not well pleased with this world, and if you do not dress it well and do everything to please it it will not be with you long." And so we often see a baby laden with all the ornaments the family can find and its ears hung with rings when it is only a few days old.

When we began our work in Africa we found the children so ready to learn that

they would come to school before we were up in the morning, and we rose before six o'clock. We were pleased with their bright little faces, and soon found that they could learn too. Not one person could read or write, and some of the fathers and mothers came with the children to learn. None of our scholars had any garments, and getting them dressed formed quite a prominent part of our work; but they soon became used to their clothes, and the girls learned to sew. Some peo-



In His Father's Best.

ple ask, "Can the African children learn anything?" Yes, we all as teachers agree to that fact. There is to-day in Walden University, Tenn., a young man, Nathaniel Merriam, who was taken into one of our schools when he was eleven years old. He knew the alphabet, but could not read. He came to America in 1896, working his passage part of the way by paring potatoes and helping the cook. He went to the university and has been



A Mission Group.

there ever since; he first prepared for a medical course and will graduate next year in medicine. He has worked his way, with the exception of a little help from friends, by lighting fires, working on the lawn and in the office. Nathaniel is the president of their Y. M. C. A., and in a contest of a large number of the colleges of the South, by an essay on Africa, he won the first prize. He is also president of the annual lecture bureau of the university of five hundred students. At a



late banquet given to Hon. J. W. Lyons, of Washington, he was chosen by the university to be toastmaster.

Diana McNeil came from West Africa and is now in California. When she was only three years old she was given by her mother to Miss McNeil, who brought her to America, and in 1892 Bishop Taylor took her up in his arms before the General Conference and said, "This is my little



An Industrial School in Liberia.

black lamb, and there are forty millions more of them in Africa."

Diana is now fourteen years old and is the youngest pupil in the high school which she attends. This year, when pupils were selected to take honors for the school, Diana was one of three chosen from the class in algebra.

These two cases prove that when the African children have equal opportunities with children in America they can do quite as good work, and

we are past the day when anyone need ask if African children can acquire an education.

The children not only learn well and are more respectful and obedient than many children in America, but they give their hearts to Jesus and make good Christians.

Many of them give evidence of the fact that they have had a change of heart, for those who stole "steal no more"; those who were quarrel-



At Home in the Kraal.

some become peaceable and give up many naughty habits because they know it will please Jesus, and they do want to please him.

Young men and women who came to us as children out of homes where human flesh had been eaten are to-day telling the story of salvation to their own people.

Will not the boys and girls in the sunny home land help these children of the "Dark Continent" with their money and their prayers?